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# A BRIEF NOTICE OF FELIX PLATTER, WITH EXTRACTS FROM HIS MS. MEMOIRS PRESERVED AT THE LIBRARY OF BÂLE.

By Charles Greene Cumston, M. D., Boston, Mass.

(31)

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The passages marked are a verbatim translation from Ed. Tricks's Preface to his edition of 'Mémoires de Félix Platter', Genève, 1866. — which my friend Cumston fails to mention! (no. H.4.37) W.H.W.

# A BRIEF NOTICE OF FELIX PLATTER, WITH EXTRACTS FROM HIS MS. MEMOIRS PRESERVED AT THE LIBRARY OF BÂLE.[1]

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In selecting the subject of Felix Platter for an address, I [105] have done so because the man has been little known, although undoubtedly his reputation as a physician, as well as his writings, are certainly familiar to those of our profession who are more or less occupied or intimately concerned with the history of medicine.

Then again, I shall refer to his memoirs, the manuscript copy of which is preserved in the University of Bâle and I believe in giving extracts therefrom, which relate more particularly to medicine, a certain amount of interesting matter heretofore unknown to many medical historians, will be brought to light. Among the numerous manuscripts from the hand of Felix Platter deposited in the Public Library at Bâle, are to be found something over two hundred detached leaves which, so to speak, together form a diary, although they contain much information quite foreign to the person of the writer. From these MS. leaves I have selected only those portions pertaining more particularly to medicine and I must confess that they give the best description of student life and medical customs of those early days that I have ever come across. The time and place of study were those of the great philosopher and erudite Rabelais. What more need be said?

The subject of this address was born in 1536 of a distinguished father, Thomas Platter. Of his early life little will be said excepting that when Platter was very young he evinced

[1] Paper read at a meeting of the Book and Journal Club of the Medical and Chirurgical Faculty of Maryland, Baltimore, February 6, 1912.

[105] a pronounced taste in the first place for poetry and music, then afterwards for show and dress which considerably occupied his thoughts. Nevertheless, the paternal advice always stood fast by him: the Dukes of Wurtemberg and the sister of Henry IV, Catherine, Duchess de Bar, were desirous of attaching him to their courts but in spite of their brilliant and reiterated offers he refused to leave Bâle. Besides Catherine de Bourbon and the Princes of the house of Wurtemburg, to whom he gave his professional care for more than forty years, Felix Platter comprised among his clients the Margraves of Baden and Brandebourg, the Dukes of Lorraine and Saxony. The most distinguished physicians of the time, as well as scientific bodies, had recourse to his knowledge. By a fortune always rare in a small country, his talents were promptly recognized and accepted by his compatriots. Received Doctor of Medicine at the age of twenty-one years, he was immediately elected member of the "consilium medicum." He had not, however, attained the required age and much comment was again made when the chair of the practice of medicine was confided to him in 1571, at the death of Jean Huber to whom he also succeeded by unanimous decision of the Council in the functions of city physician, or as it was termed *archiater,* which position invested with him the direction of the hospitals as well as the care of watching over the public health. He retained this position to the end of his life, in other words during a period of forty-three years. At the time of the plague of 1563-'64, his devotion obtained for him a universal gratitude. While several of his colleagues were careful of their person and another fled to Frankfort, Felix Platter supervised everything. The epidemic carried off his servant and a young man who was living with him, it seized upon his father, his mother, and all their household, but he fulfilled his duty with courage, braving the contagion at each step. Upon four other occasions, in 1576, 1582, 1593, and 1609, he was again face to face with the same scourge. Curiously enough, he and his wife were never affected; only upon one occasion, having committed the imprudence to hold the hand of a dying patient, a sore developed on his hand but fortunately the infection remained localized.

As a professor he was in no way inferior to the practitioner. [105]
A rich experience, a clear, methodical and penetrating mind, combined with an elegance of elocution readily explains why Platter became an eminent teacher and that his disciples loved him for his affable and gentle character, likewise his untiring zeal and enthusiasm. Haller (Biblioth. anat., 1, 255) calls him the star of the University of Bâle; this epithet is quite justified if one will reflect upon the impulse given to the Faculty of Medicine by Platter, seconded by Theodore Zwinger and Gaspard Bauhin.

Upon his return to his native town, Platter found only one or two medical students, but in the year 1575 there were already fifteen matriculated. From 1532 to 1560 only nine degrees of Doctor of Medicine had been given; during the twenty-five following years the number of degrees reached one hundred and fourteen while it attained four hundred and fifty-four in the period comprised between the year 1586 to 1610. German, Dutch, Hungarian, Italian, French and Eng- [106]
lish students flocked to Bâle and were proud of the honor of receiving their degree of M. D. from the University.

Two innovations contributed to this prosperity, namely, dissection and the creation of a chair of botany and anatomy. This initiative belongs to Platter. As a student at the Faculty of Montpellier, which at this time was distinguished from the majority of other schools in that each year the professors publicly dissected two or three cadavers, he had followed these operations with the greatest interest, overcoming the repugnance that his naturally timid and impressionable na ture caused. He had hardly returned to Bâle when he performed an autopsy before a large audience, an event which had not taken place in that town since the days of Andreas Vesalius. However, the installation of Gaspard Bauhin as professor of anatomy and botany, the establishment of an amphitheatre and of a medicinal garden, only date from the year 1589.

Felix Platter only wrote late in life and he was nearly fifty when, in 1583, he gave the printer his work entitled: *De corporis humani structura et usu.* Then twenty years passed by before he published his *Praxeos medicæ,* the first volume

[106] of which appeared in 1602, the third and last in 1608. Many editions of this manual of pathology and therapeutics succeeded each other at short intervals up to the year of 1736, a success all the more remarkable because it corresponds to that period during which medicine was undergoing a complete transformation. And lastly, when nearly an octogenarian and having behind him fifty-seven years of practice, Platter published his *Observationum in hominis affectibus* which contained the fruit of his long experience.

If these works have not always been appreciated at their just value, it is usually because one has lost sight of the object for which they were written, viz., the instruction of students. Plater has particularly been reproached in that his first work, that on anatomy, contains only plates reproduced after those of Vesalius. On this point our author explains himself with perfect frankness, for he distinctly states: "As up to the present time the plates of Vesalius are the best that have ever been offered, and as it would be almost impossible to surpass them, I would have willingly added them to this volume introducing a few slight changes (because the opportunity presented itself for buying them), if I had not been prevented from this intention by the necessity of adopting under the circumstances a large size volume which would be very inconvenient for students. That is why I have had engraved on copper, reducing them in size and slightly changing them, the plates of Vesalius that I have completed by adding a few others." Several of the figures are new or present more details than those of Vesalius and, consequently, there can be no question of plagiarism on the part of Platter.

Scientific knowledge without literary culture produces a dryness of the mind and the development of pedantism, whose inseparable companion is a poverty of ideas. On the other hand much is due to letters in many a discovery made in various domains which are foreign to them. Thomas Platter impressed his son Felix with the importance of the dead languages and it was not likely, in point of fact, that these would be unknown to him at a time when, thanks to the vogue of Galen and Hippocrates, the chair of Greek was almost always filled by a physician. From this classical education, Felix

Platter derived a promptitude of intelligence and a gift of [106]
analysis, two qualities which not a little contributed to his renown. In reality, his successes as a practitioner are in a less degree due to his complicated prescriptions, composed of thirty or forty ingredients, than to his great skill in diagnosis. His *Praxeos medicæ* is recommendable in the first place by a rational classification of diseases, which are studied according to their nature and not merely in relation to their seat. His observations on insanity give evidence of a remarkable insight to diseases of the mind and he protests against the heartless and barbarous treatment to which the insane were in those days subjected; he endeavored to obtain a cure by adopting a method which takes into consideration the moral phenomena, and, consequently, it is not too much to say that Platter was a fore-runner of the immortal Pinel.

In endeavoring to discover morbid causes by post-mortem examinations, Platter certainly inaugurated pathological anatomy. And, lastly, he pointed out the utility of exact statistics, when at the time of the epidemics of plague he drew up the census of the city, street by street, indicating for each house the number of its inhabitants, their names and their civil condition, the number of cases occurring in each epidemic, likewise the deaths, and all this work was undertaken when his mind was full of other medical preoccupations but which, nevertheless, remains as a most precious historic document.

This originality of view is quite in accord with the freshness of mind that the taste for poetry kept up in Felix Platter to the very last of his life. As an old man he was pleased to compose bits of verse both serious and light. When near his end he wrote his epitaph, a rough translation of which I will here give, although much of its beauty is naturally lost. "Upon this earth my vocation was to study the works of God and to apply myself, from my early youth, to turn them to His glory as well as to the well being of my fellow creatures. Now my soul enjoys celestial felicity: it contemplates the magnificences of the Lord, until that time when He shall resuscitate it with my body on the day of Judgment."

Plater was always a lover of music while plants and animals also occupied his leisure moments. His magnificent garden

[106] containing rare plants and vegetables which he himself cultivated, was the admiration of all. Rich was his collection of objects of art and natural history, which unfortunately was dispersed during the eighteenth century. The memoirs of de Thou, the historian, contain the following relative to Platter:

*Il visita Félix Plater, docteur en médicine, logé dans une grande et agréable maison, et qui le reçut fort civilement. Plater lui fit voir dans son écurie une espèce d'âne sauvage, de la grandeur des mulets de Toscane ou d'Auvergne, le corps court et de longues jambes, la corne du pied fendue comme celle d'une biche, quoique plus grosse, le poil hérissé et d'une couleur jaunâtre et brune. Il lui montra encore un rat de montagne de la grandeur d'un chat, qu'ils appellent une marmotte: ce petit animal étoit enfermé dans*
[107] *une cassette, et comme it avoit passé l'hiver sans manger, il étoit tout engourdi. Plater avoit aussi l'étui des fossiles de Conrad Gesner venue de Zurich, tel qu'il est décrit et dessiné dans un de ses livres. Cet étui renfermoit bien des raretés différentes, entre autres quantité d'insects particuliers, qui semblent autant de jeux de la nature. De Thou les examina à loisir et avec une grande curiosité, aidé de d'Amerbach, qui s'y connoissoit fort bien.*

In the following year, viz., 1580, it was the turn of our dear Montaigne. In his "Voyage en Italie," speaking of Bâle the following paragraph will be found:

*Nous y vîmes de singulier la maison d'un medicin nommé Félix Platerus, la plus peinte et enrichie de mignardises à la françoise qu'il est possible de voir; laquelle ledit médicin a bâtie fort grande, ample et somptueuse. Entre autre choses, il dresse un livre des simples qui est deja fort avancé; et au lieu que les autres font peindre les herbes selon leurs couleurs, lui a trouvé l'art de les coller toutes naturelles si proprement sur le papier, que les moindres feuilles et fibres y apparoissent comme elles sont, et il feuillette son livre, sans que rien en échappe; et montra des simples qui y étoient collés y avoit plus de vingt ans. Nous vîmes aussi et chez lui et en école publique des anatomies entières d'hommes morts, qui se tiennent. . . . Nous y vîmes* [at Bâle] *force gens de savoir, comme Grineus, et celui qui a fait le Theatrum, et ledit médicin (Platerus), et Francois Hottoman. Ces deux derniers vinrent souper avec messieurs, lendemain qu'ils furent arrivés.*

Felix Platter died of dropsy on July 28, 1614, after a fortnight of great suffering. Only twice during his long life was he seriously ill. His wife had died eleven months before; their married life had been fifty-six years, and the only unhappiness

casting a shadow over their union was the absence of children. [107] They both left a large amount of money to be used for giving gratuitous medical treatment to the poor. Platter was buried in the cloister of the cathedral in Bâle and his stone, placed beside that of his father, bears the following inscription:

C. S.
Archiatro Basil. Dignissimo,
Urbis imo orbis Aescvlapio,
Acad. Professori Celeberrimo
Annos XLIII, Continvos,
Qui Rector Magnif. Sextum Fuit,
Quique Uno in Coniugio exoptatiss.
Cum Magdal. Ieckelman Matron. Lectiss.
Ante Annum Pie Defuncta,
Maritus vixit Annos LVI.
Doctor Vero Annos LVII.
Felici Platero Thomae F.
Naturae, Artisque Operum
Indagatori Solertissimo,
Conquisitori copiosissimo,
Medicorum suae Aetat. Principi
Nomine et Omine Felici,
Viro Probo, Probis Omnib. Probata,
In Egenos Liberali,
In Omnes Officioso,
Phthisi Sen. in Sed. Beat.
Sublato:
At Salutaribus Inventis,
Ingeniique Monumentis,
Aeternum Victuro,
Thomas Platerus D. Prof. Anat. Bot.
Fratri, Potius Patri Desideratiss.
M. H. P.
Vixit Annos. LXXVII M. IX.
Obitt Anno Sal. M. D. C. XIV. IVL. XXIIX.

I will now make extracts from Platter's diary, only selecting those portions which bear directly on his student life and medical subjects. I would point out that Catalan was an apothecary at Montpellier with whom he lived during three years that he studied in this city and that the Dr. Saporta to whom he refers was a famous professor and practitioner whose family originally came from Spain and whose ancestors were well known physicians in the epoch in which they lived. Rab-

[107] elais refers to Saporta as a fellow student. Platter arrived in Montpellier some time in the latter part of October, 1553, and returned to Bâle on February 24, 1557. After giving a thrilling account of his journey to Montpellier and of his arrival in that city he says:

I at once began to follow the lectures. As is the custom each student chooses a preceptor, to whom he may refer for advice, and so I selected Dr. Saporta. I gave myself up seriously to the study of medicine; I listened to two or three lectures in the morning and as many in the afternoon. The letters and pressing exhortations of my father greatly stimulated me; I worked with great zeal, which greatly pleased my old host Catalan. He always spoke Latin to me according to his way, that is to say very badly, and when I replied in a rather more correct manner, he was very greatly astonished.

The running of my master's house was extremely economical, following the Spanish custom. It should be known that the Marans[2] do not use any of the food which the Jews abstain from. On the days we eat meat we had for dinner a mutton soup (but rarely beef) with small turnips and cabbage; it was good but the bouillon was not abundant. Each one had his plate and ate with the fingers. Afterwards came the roast. The wine was not wanting; it is a dark red and is mixed with much water. You have the servant pour for you into your glass the quantity of water you desire, then the wine is added; the servant throws away the wine that you leave because it cannot be kept for more than a year as it rapidly transforms into vinegar.

My master changed his pharmacy. I followed him to his new spacious and pleasing house. A room was given me for my use. Later on, with plates, I arranged the upper room for a study; I ornamented it with pictures, my host had a guilded arm chair put in for me (because he always took good care of me), so that when people came into the room each one was in ecstacy. The hall ended upon a beautiful terrace from which the entire city could be seen; the view extended as far as the sea, whose grumblings I could hear from time to time. It was here that I sat while studying; I cultivated the Indian fig tree which was developed from a slip sent to him from Spain. Often I sat at the window and played the lute; the people who lived opposite, a Monsieur Saint-George, and particularly his sister, Miss Martha, listened to me with pleasure.

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[2] The Marans were the descendants of the Moors that Ferdinand, the Catholic, expelled from Spain. Many came to Montpellier.

With the advent of the new year a large number of diversions [108] commenced, particularly gallant serenades at night in front of the houses. The same individual played upon the cymbals, drum and fife; the hautbois was also known, even quite generally played upon while the violincello and guitar were just becoming fashionable. The notable bourgeois gave balls to which the young ladies were taken; after supper dancing in the torch light was resorted to. These assemblies continued until daylight. The balls only ceased at the last day of the carnival.

We celebrated Epiphany at the Collegium among us Germans; the old beadle prepared the delicacies and the cake; Andreas de Croatie got the bean. Two days later we again celebrated Epiphany at the house of Rondeletius.[3] As the Germans were reconducting by torch light some of their comrades, they were accosted by the captain of the watch who started to disarm them. From this resulted a great tumult in front of my host's pharmacy. Stephanus Contzenus obstinately refused to give up his dagger; Master Catalan having come out, begged him to give the arm to him; this was done and order was again restored. On the very next day the Germans made a complaint before the bailiff for violation of their franchises. The captain was blamed and we were assured that such an abuse would not occur again.

On the Sunday of the Quinquagesime (our *Herrenfastnacht* (Shrove-Sunday)), there was dancing throughout the entire city; everywhere accords of music could be heard and everywhere there were masquerades of a thousand different kinds. These festivities continued on Monday and the following day, which is called Mardi gras. On this day the young people form a procession: around the neck they carried a bag filled with oranges (their very low price in this country, a dozen only costing about two cents) and a basket on the arm in guise of a shield. When they reached the Place Nôtre-Dame, they began throwing the oranges at each other's heads and soon the pavement was covered with the débris. On the same Tuesday, the doctors of law went through the different quarters of the city disguised.

With Ash Wednesday Lent commences, during which it is forbidden, under the penalty of life, to eat either meat or eggs. It is quite true that we Germans transgressed this order by stealth. It was at this time that I learned how to spread butter on a sheet of paper, break the eggs on this and cook them over the heated coals; prudence demanded that no utensils should be employed. During Lent I cooked eggs over the candle, they being spread on buttered paper, and then I threw the shells into my study; later

[3] Rondelet was a very celebrated physician and Chancellor of the University of Montpellier. The character of Dr. Rondebilis in Rabelais' writings is simply a caricature of the eminent professor.

[108] on a servant discovered this mass of shells; she told her mistress who displayed a very marked displeasure, but did not push the inquest any further. It is the custom to break the pots which have been used for cooking meat and to buy new ones in which to cook the fish.

A gentleman, one of our neighbors, invited me on a certain day to a nocturnal concert in honor of a young lady; this is what is called an aubade. At midnight we came before the house. We commenced by beating a drum in order to wake up the inhabitants of the quarter; then trumpets were heard, afterwards the hautbois, after the hautbois the fifes, after the fifes the violincellos and lastly three lutes, the entire performance lasted certainly three quarters of an hour. We were then conducted to a pastry cook where we were largely treated; we drank muscat and hyppocras and the night was passed in festivities.

My father sent me two beautiful skins dyed green; I had a garment made with them embroidered with green silk in which I strutted about and excited the envy of the gentlemen at the assemblies of dance. I arranged with a lame boot maker, whom we called Vulcan, that he was to bring me a new pair of shoes each Sunday; for the entire year this only cost me three francs, that is to say ten of our batzen.[4]

Although there are many physicians who do not take the trouble to become learned in their art, I always felt myself forced to learn everything that a doctor should know. At each instant I repeatedly heard how many physicians there were at Bâle; consequently, at my return there it would be necessary for me to make my way and even to rise above my colleagues. On the other hand, I was fully aware that my father was laden with debts, that his position only gave him a small compensation, that his boarders were his principal financial resource, and that, consequently, it would hardly be possible for him to help me. He himself wrote me to in no way count on his fortune, that he was not a rich man, but merely a schoolmaster, a poor peasant; that I was to make my calculation as if I had no fortune to be left me, or at the most a very small amount. How could one then foresee that he would again marry at a very advanced age and that he would bring forth such a numerous posterity?

All these circumstances caused me not only to study and follow the lectures with assiduity, but also to attentively watch in the pharmacy the manner in which medicines are prepared. My master had a large practice: consequently I derived much profit from the time spent in his laboratory. And still more, I collected a large number of plants that I delicately fixed on paper. But

[4] A batz was a piece of money used at Bâle, in value being about six cents

above all things I was desirous of knowing anatomy. I, consequently, never failed to be present when a cadaver was secretly opened. At the beginning, this operation was extremely repulsive to me; nevertheless, with some Welch students, I ran more than one risk in order to obtain subjects. Frequent dissections took place at the house of Gallotus, who had married a lady of Montpellier and enjoyed a certain fortune. He convened us to go armed outside of the city to dig up secretly, in the cemeteries adjacent to the cloisters, the bodies which had been buried on the same day; we carried them to his house, where we proceeded to the autopsy. Certain individuals were present at burials and then they would lead us to the grave. [108]

My first expedition of this kind dates from December 11, 1554. The night was already dark when Gallotus lead us outside the city to the monastery of the Augustins. We there found an adventurous monk who had disguised himself and gave us his help. We entered furtively into the cloister, where we remained drinking until midnight. Then, well armed, and observing the greatest silence we went to the cemetery of the convent of St. Denis. Myconius had his sword drawn while the Welchmen had their daggers unsheathed. We dug up the corpse with only our hands, because the earth had not had time to become compact. When once the cadaver was brought to light a rope was passed round it and, pulling with all our might, we brought it up to the surface; after having enveloped it in our cloaks, we carried it on two rods up to the entrance of the city. It might have been about three o'clock in the morning. We placed our load in a corner and then knocked at the gate. An old porter presented himself in his shirt and opened; we begged him to give us a drink, pretexting that we were dying of thirst. While he went to get the wine three of us brought the cadaver in and carried it to Gallotus' house which was not far away. The porter suspected nothing. As to the monks of St. Denis, they found themselves obliged to guard the cemetery and from their cloister they fired with their arbalest[5] on the students who presented themselves.

The theatrum often served for dissections, which were then presided over by a professor; a barber manipulated the scalpel. Beside the students the audience contained a large number of noblemen and citizens, ladies as well, even when one dissected a male; many monks also came there. I exercised myself a little in distilling. I took note of a large number of receipts that the doctors gave me or which I borrowed from works of Falco; the latter were inherited by my host from Falco himself; he kept them under key in a room into which I introduced myself by a ladder not without danger. I was also indebted to the knowledge of ex-

[5] A cross-bow.

[108] cellent remedies either to Kirchmannus who had them from the physician Faber, of Cologne, or to students who brought them back from Italy and with whom I discussed science. I put in writing the *loci communes in tota medicina;* I reduced into tables the most important books of Galen; I heard Rondeletius express his strange opinions of which I took careful note. Once we passed
[109] an entire night copying a book: *De componendis medicamentis,* that Rondeletius loaned us; we were careful not to omit a receipt for causing hair to grow, because still being without a beard, we thought that a mustache would give us a more respectable appearance: how many times in the evening have we besmirched our lips, which resulted in soiling the pillows; we also scraped under the nose with a razor, but all these fine means were not at all efficacious.

At this time, Humelius informed me that his pharmacy was not at all profitable, that few remedies were prescribed, that the people of Bâle were not at all anxious in having skilful physicians, that the prescriptions were rather more German than Latin. The majority of physicians purged with senna, licorice and other absurd receipts. Dr. Isaac conducted himself as a quack of the lowest order. In brief, it was better to be a beggar than an apothecary at Bâle. All that the physicians knew how to do was to purge; as to potent medicines, like those prescribed at Montpellier, there was no question of them. Humulius, consequently counted on me to reform this condition of affairs. His letters stimulated me; I could foresee the possibility of rising above my colleagues and of introducing several novelties such as the enema, topics and a large number of excellent specifics. By the grace of God this did happen.

My father warned me not to permit myself to care for my German comrades, on account of the punishment that one ran the risk of receiving at Montpellier if one practiced the art of healing without having a diploma: such offenders are placed astride the back of an ass, facing the animal's rear, whose tail they hold in the place of reins; then they are led through the streets in the midst of the laughter of the populace, finally they are conducted out of the town and during the entire course the children amuse themselves by covering them with mud.

On March third, 1555, Guilelmus Eduardus was received doctor of medicine. The promotion, presided over by Saporta, was celebrated in the church with great solemnity and to the sound of organs. The recipient rendered grace in five or six languages, among which German, although he did not know the others. He was given a very pleasant promenade through the city; a silk plume decorated his square bonnet; the hautbois played; branches of cinnamon and little figures of sugar were carried in the procession. There was a magnificent collation: more than a quintal

of dragées were thrown about; the hyppocras was excellent; afterwards came the dancing. [109]

On May 28th, 1556, I was received bachelor of medicine; Dr. Saporta performed the promotion at the *collegium regium*. The doctors of medicine of the University argued against me; the actus lasted from six to nine o'clock in the morning. After which I put on a red robe and rendered thanks by a carmen in which the Germans were not forgotten. In the beginning, I had recited by heart a long oration. Finally I paid eleven francs and three sous, for which I received a diploma bearing a seal. The Germans presented their congratulations to me; in order to show my appreciation, I offered them a banquet.

About this time a tumult occurred. The students reproached the professors for not giving their lectures. They assembled and armed they marched around the college and those who were there listening to a lecture were invited to come out and join the rest. It was thus that Hoechstetter came to ask me to join while I was at Saporta's lecture; I did not feel like giving offence to this professor, but Hoechstetter would not listen to me and I was finally obliged to go towards the house of parliament with an enormous crowd of students of all nationalities. There our procurator complained in our name of the neglect of the doctors and demanded the re-establishment of the ancient custom by which two procuratores, elected by the students, were invested in the right to retain the stipendia belonging to the professors who failed to give their lectures. The doctors replied by the mouth of a procurator; nevertheless, our request was granted and the tumult subsided. My father wrote me how happy he was to think that we Germans were not disturbed on account of religion. As it had come to his ears that I was quite as good a dancer as a lute player, he ended his letter by begging me not to become in love with a Welch girl, because he was doing everything in his power to give me a most agreeable wife as soon as I should return to my native country. He revealed to me the negotiations he had commenced with Master Franz Jeckelmann. The latter did not say no, but he wished to await my return before deciding anything. My father highly praised the young lady, her virtues, her judgment and her docility. He had for a long time suspected, and my comrade Hummel had recently confirmed him in this idea, that the young person was pleasing to me; for this reason he made me these overtures sooner than it was perhaps proper, but so that I would be all the more hasty in completing my *cursus studiorum* and return to Bâle. He advised me to follow my studies with ardor and not to neglect surgery.

"Great," said he, "is our penury in surgeons; the majority are children who are lacking in knowledge and experience. A difficult case comes up (?) They tremble like wet hens, scratch-

[109] ing their heads in secret but before people *promittunt salutem.* What is the result? The patients remain deformed, when they do not die. It is necessary under such conditions that the physician should know how to advise and give assistance or even take the knife in hand; the profit is quite worth the trouble. My son, the desire of thy father is to give in thee to the country an honest man, distinguished and useful. At Bâle the number of physicians is frightful and if one is not capable of surpassing his confrères, one is sure of remaining for all his life a kind of beggar unless he should become an aulicus and engage himself in a foreign country. Now, above all things, I want to guard thee with us. He who has the greatest talent is the one who will espouse the wife of his choice."

I wrote home, admitting that the young lady had been dear to me for a long time; I only asked for the time to be received doctor and to return to my country, because the hope of obtaining her hand removed from my thoughts any idea of settling elsewhere than in Bâle. I added that the will of her father was not sufficient, that it was necessary to obtain her consent, and I begged my father to find out her sentiments when the occasion should present itself. One night I dreamed that I had a pain in my hand and that I went to consult the barber Jeckelmann, when his daughter applied something to the suffering member and I felt myself healed. Upon awaking I took this dream to mean a promise of our union.

Some time after this several of my compatriots and school friends arrived at Montpellier. They carried long Swiss swords, their costumes being completely German. One would have taken them for German foot soldiers, their manners were gross. By them I received a large number of letters. My father informed me how he had acquitted himself of my errand, viz. to ascertain what I desired to know: an enterprise not easy of undertaking, because the young lady only went out to go to church, without taking into consideration the fact that rumor was abroad that there was an understanding between herself and me. Finally my father was able to speak to her alone: he told her that I desired to know if she took pleasure in my person and if, God helping, she would accept me upon my return when I should ask for her hand. Blushing, she had replied that what pleased her father would also please her; she had always heard me spoken of favorably and had always held me in high esteem. For that matter, for a long time I had been most agreeable to her and this fact she had let be seen by the god-mother of her father, the old Schultheiss Fren, because she had admitted to the latter never to have felt for anyone as much inclination as she had for me. Consequently, she would wait for me. She had the intention of
[110] going on a certain Sunday on a promenade with the family in

the neighborhood of Gumdeldingen, and my father proposed to [110]
offer them a collation. It is readily comprehensible that this letter filled me with joy and courage. I sent Master Jeckelmann and to his daughter two beautiful embroidered cushions, some excellent Cyprus wine and two large branches of coral.

On August 25th, 1556, I received letters from Bâle, among which five sheets of paper folded like a book in octavo and completely covered with my father's writing. He showed that he was satisfied in knowing that I was working steadily to arrive *ad gradum;* he hoped that the next year would see me back in my country because Master Jeckelmann commenced to be impatient: numerous pretenders to his daughter's hand, several of whom of very excellent family, did not allow him any rest. My father also perceived that, on account of the good will which she had towards me, my future wife would salute my return with pleasure and that she sighed for that time to come. "And those who have been refused repeat: We want to see what a fine doctor he will make, he who supplants us in the estimation of Barber Franz! Have I need of telling you more along these lines? The entire city is filled with the news that Master Jeckelmann has assuredly promised thee his daughter and that from this time on it is useless for anyone to present himself. If thou couldst only hear all the talk which is made it would excite thee to confound some day those who reproached thee with thine happiness. But if thou preoccupy thyself above all to render glory to God, to fill me with satisfaction and be useful to the country, there is more than is necessary to encourage thee in thine work." My father also said that I would receive great praise by taking my degree of doctor at Bâle rather than elsewhere: the magistrates and the bourgeoisie would look upon this with a better eye than if I imitated those who take their promotion in a foreign country and who are reputed too incapable of taking the degree at our university; because one knows the saying: *Accipimus pecuniam et mittimus stultos in Germaniam.*

In November 1556 I resolved to return to the paternal roof in the following spring, by the way of Toulouse, Paris and France. My host bought me a horse and supplied me with the necessaries for the journey; my father had some money waiting for me at Paris. I was to have a companion, Theodorus Birckmannus, of Cologne, an erudite young man who not only knew how to play string instruments, but also the fife, so that is was easy for us to amuse ourselves upon the slightest occasion during our journey. A neighbor sold the horse and I disposed of my good lute not without regret. The twenty-fourth of February we treated our comrades at the inn and bade them good-bye. I called upon my professors and other acquaintances, also upon a few young ladies. The twenty-seventh of February I bade good-bye to Monsieur

[110] Catalanus who cried, likewise his wife and his servants. Brickmann arrived in front of the pharmacy with the Germans who wished to conduct us on our start. I straddled my horse and, God aiding, but with a very heavy heart in leaving this good city where I had so long time dwelt, I started off escorted by quite a numerous suite on horseback. Then I was seized by fright in thinking of the dangers which might assail me during the long trip and at the thought that I would never again see Montpellier, my heart became tender, my eyes moistened with tears.

As has already been pointed out, Platter arrived in Bâle early in the year 1557 and I will now quote his description of the taking of the degree of doctor of medicine in his native city, which is all the more curious and interesting, because it is a description given by the candidate himself.

The time had come to take my doctorate. Wishing to furnish a preliminary proof of my knowledge before making an official demand, I begged of the Faculty of Medicine the permission to profess at the *collegium* during the canicule, which was at once accorded me. Immediately I prepared myself. I sold my horse for one half of his original cost; my father took the sum, so that I was very short of money. Great was my ardor in working. On July 21, after having, on the preceding Sunday, put up notices on the doors of the church that I was to give a course of lectures, I gave my first lecture at the *collegium* in the *aula medicorum*. I commenced by a long peroration. Then I undertook the explanation of the *liber Galeni de causis morborum*. At the beginning nearly all of the doctors and the majority of the professors figured in the audience, but at the end there were only two Dutchmen remaining. On going out from the lecture they accompanied me to my home, climbed the mulberry trees in my father's garden and regaled themselves with their fruit. I showed them some curiosities in order to encourage them to follow my lectures with assiduity.

On August 14, I went to Dr. Oswaldus Berus,[6] Dean of the Faculty, and in an oration I postulated the *gradus medicus*. Thereupon I was assigned for the next day, Sunday afternoon, at the house of this same Dr. Oswaldus behind the cathedral where the three professors composing the *collegium medicum* met together. After having heard my harangue requesting the degree, they fin-

[6] Oswald Ber, received doctor of medicine at Bâle in 1512, appointed professor in 1513, remained dean at the Faculty of Medicine from 1520 to the time of his death in 1567. He was rector in 1529 when the University was closed and it was he himself who re-opened it as rector in 1532.

ally came to the censure: I proved that I had studied for so many [110]
years, then I showed my diplomas of Master and Bachelor of Medicine obtained at Montpellier. The professors appeared satisfied; but when they asked my age and I replied that I would be twenty-one years October next, the Decanus entered into a discourse in order to declare that the candidate should be at least twenty-four years of age. They consequently sent me away. I entered my home extremely put out, persuaded that my youth was to be an obstacle to my promotion. The same evening I told my troubles to my future father-in-law; he became angry: "If they make any difficulties," cried he, "I will give you my horse and you may go and obtain your diploma at Montpellier." However, I tormented myself gratuitously because the professors had not taken seriously their objection and they regretted that I had left so quickly.

On the next day, August 16, the beadle came to notify me for the *tentamen*, which took place in the house of Dr. Oswaldus before the three same personages. They interrogated me lengthily, particularly on medical questions; I replied to them with alacrity, it was not as difficult as I had imagined. The examination lasted three complete hours, after which they gave me the two *puncta* to explain the next day, viz., an aphorism of Hippocrates: *mutationes temporum pariunt morbos*, and the *definitio medicinæ Gal. in arte parva: medicina est scientia salubrium*, etc. At the end of this séance, Margaret, Dr. Oswald's daughter, served us with cake and wine; then the professors were extremely gay with me; for that matter, it was I who paid.

I passed the examination the next day, August 17, in the same place. I was compelled to expatiate *memoriter*, for the lapse of about an hour, on the *themata* which had been given me, just exactly as if I were professing. Then the three doctors took up the speech in order to refute my argument and this lasted full three hours; Dr. Oswald especially, who considered himself a great philosopher, worried me quite lengthily. Finally, I was allowed to retire; then I was called back and was informed according to custom, that in a short time I should be obliged to uphold a public debate. Following this we partook of a collation for which I paid, along with a little gift to Dr. Oswald's daughter.

I prepared myself for the debate. I received two short *themata* from the Dean; they were not too much to my liking, and if the [111]
candidate had had, as he has today, the right of choosing, I should have preferred a more ample subject. I had these *themata* printed with a few commentaries, and on Sunday, August 29, they were posted at the four parish churches; the beadle carried copies to all the doctors and professors at the same time notifying them of the debate. This was fixed for the following Thursday. Now, on Monday, I was taken with fever, accompanied by a catarrh: it

[111] was a disease called the croup which was prevalent at that time. I was, consequently, very uncomfortable. The epidemic spread far and near. Later on I learned that it had appeared at Montpellier, at which place it was called the whooping cough. Nevertheless, on Thursday, September 2, I presented myself for upholding the debate which took place in the *aula medicorum;* it commenced at seven o'clock in the morning and lasted untill noon. Nearly all the academicians were present because there had not been a debate for a long time. The doctors of medicine alone spoke (there were hardly more than one or two students at this time; the professors Huberus and Isaacus gave them the lectures), but the masters of philosophy also mixed in with the discussion. By the aid of God, I got out of it not without honor. The seance once ended, I was obliged to regale an entire table full of guests at The Crown. After the repast, I hied myself to the usual meeting place to tell my joy to Madeleine.

On September 6, the members of the Faculty requested me to come to them in order to announce that I was admitted to the doctorate and to congratulate me. As soon as they had notified me at my house of the day and time of the promotion, I made the necessary arrangements. I had been assigned two promotores: Dr. Isaac, gave me the *themata* of my discourse, and Dr. Oswald Ber was appointed to give me the insignia. I had the notification printed, and the following Saturday, accompanied by Dr. Isaac and the beadle, I went to invite *ad actum* the burgomasters, scholars, academicians and a large number of my good friends, among whom my future father-in-law.

On Monday, September 26, I was conducted to the house of Dean Ber. Here we drank malmsey, then the procession proceeded to the *collegium.* I wore a garment of black woolen, embroidered on all the seams with a band of velvet the breadth of a hand; I wore red tights and a pourpoint of silk of the same color. In front of Dr. Huber's house, Dr. Oswald suddenly remembered that I should also dissert without preparation on a subject given at the time, and as he had forgotten to bring a book with him, he had one taken from the study of Dr. Huber.[7] We arrived at the *aula medicorum.* It was draped with rich tapestries and filled with people because for a long time back there had been no doctor's promotion. I took my place in the lower cathedra, Dr. Isaac in the upper one. The trumpets sounded, and Dr. Isaac

[7] John Huber, of Bâle (1507-1571), a student of J. Sapidus, of Schlettstadt, studied more particularly at Montpellier and Toulouse. He practised medicine with success, was appointed professor of physics in 1544, a little later professor of theoretical medicine and in 1567, at the death of Oswald Ber, professor of practical medicine.

having pronounced a discourse, proposed the *themata* to me. [111] Immediately I recited my oration by heart, although it was long; then Dr. Isaac passed me over to the Dean and left the chair. Dr. Oswald received me with a short allocution, and preceded by the beadle carrying the sceptre, we mounted into the upper chair. There, with the customary solemnity, the Dean placed a velvet cap on my head and then upon it a beautiful crown; in short, he accomplished all the customary ceremonies, without forgetting the ring which he placed on my finger. After having proclaimed me doctor, he ordered me to give a sample of my knowledge by at once treating the first subject offered. He looked through his book and designated a place; I read as if the text of my thesis was found printed there, and then I began to dissert. After a moment, the Dean closed the book, saying that that was sufficient; then he gave me the privilege of speaking so that I might offer up my thanks, which I did in a long harangue that I had learned by heart. This was the last act of the ceremony; it had lasted more than four hours. The four trumpets again sounded and we left in procession to go to The Crown, where the banquet was prepared. The rector, Wolfgang Wissenburg, walked by my side; then came the venerable Dr. Amberbach and other academicians in quite a large number: in front of me the beadle and the four musicians marched, playing all the way. At the repast, there were seven tables; we were very well treated and it only cost me four batzen a head. The dinner ended at three o'clock because the banquets were not so prolonged then as they are at present. According to custom, the guests preceded by the sceptre were bade farewell to by Dr. Isaac. He then led me to his residence where we had a collation. After which I was conducted to the paternal roof.

Immediately after his promotion to the grade of doctor, Platter was married, the details of which happy occasion he enters into at length in his journal. What he says gives a very excellent insight into the customs of those days, but as I wish to hold to the medical portions of his journal more particularly, I shall immediately proceed to translate what he says of physicians and the practice of medicine at Bâle at the time he commenced.

At Bâle, at the time of my return, great was the number of those who practised medicine. Here is the list of the graduates: Dr. Oswald Ber, Physician to the City; Dr. Jean Huber; Dr. Isaac Keller; Dr. Adam de Bodenstein, called Carlstadt; Dr. Henri Pantaléon; [8] Dr. Gaspard Petri, called Mellinger; Dr. Guilelmus

[8] Henri Pantaléon, born at Bâle in 1502, had frequently changed his profession and place of abode before being appointed, in

[111] Gratarolus de Bergame; Dr. Jacob Huggelin; Dr. Jacob Wecker, the licentiate Philippus Bechius, and Joh. Bauhinus. I do not count Jacobus Myconius nor Dr. Jacobus Zonion who left after a short time. As to quacks there were: Ziliochs, of Saint-Alban, to whom one went to consult just like a physician, and the widow of Othon Brunfels who enjoyed a great reputation. To all these I added my own self and one year after, Dr. Theodorus Zwingerus [9]
[112] swelled the list. Thus in 1557-1558, Bâle possessed nearly seventeen physicians. It was, consequently, necessary for me to strive if I were to make my livelihood; in this respect God has covered me with benedictions. At this time a certain Ammann was greatly extolled: he was a peasant at Utzensdorf to whom an extraordinary crowd rushed; the urine indicated to him the nature of the disease; during many years he performed curious practises which resulted in his making a very large fortune. After this individual the Jew Alsswiler was for a long time greatly sought after. In the *ruelle des Tanneurs* an old woman called Lülbürenen, also gave many consultations, likewise two executioners, Wolf Kaese and George Kaese; their elder brother had acquired a great renown as a physician at Schaffhausen, like his father Wolf, the executioner of Tubingen.

Patients from the middle class and nobility commenced to

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1544, professor of the Latin tongue at the Pædagogium, which did not prevent him from pursuing his studies in theology and medicine. Deacon of St. Peter, he obtained the licentiate in theology, but the ecclesiastical career did not appear suited to his character which was an enemy of constraint. After a time he gave up his functions as deacon and went to study medicine at Valencia, Avignon and Montpellier.

In 1558 the *concilium medicum* of Bâle received him in its midst. Pantaléon died March 3, 1595. Among his many writings may be mentioned his *diarium historicum* and the *Heldenbuch deutscher Nation.* Emperor Maxillian II made him Poet Laureate and also a palatin count.

[9] Theodore Zwinger, or Speiser (1533-1588), was a student of Thomas Platter and by his mother a nephew of the erudite printer Jean Oporin. He successfully occupied the chairs of Greek, Ethics and Theoretical Medicine at Bâle. It is said that his house had as tapestry only inscriptions in Hebrew, Greek, and German. Zwinger translated, at the same time adding commentaries, several works of Hippocrates and Galen, and composed among others, *Theatrum humanæ vitæ*, *Methodus apodemica* and *Physiologia medica.* His biography has been written by Felix Platter in the commencement of the *Theatrum*, in the 1604 Bâle edition. The account here given by Felix Platter is an honor to both these physicians.

come to me. They submitted my knowledge to a singular test: [112]
they sent me their urine and I was to guess the disease. I did so well that several were greatly surprised at my replies and finally took the habit of consulting me. My clientele increased daily, not only in the city but also without. People came to Bâle for a stay to be under my care; others came and left at once, taking my prescriptions with them; or on the other hand, foreigners requested me to come to their houses and the castles; I went there with rapidity, hardly staying with them and regained my house as quickly as I had left. In this way it was possible to treat a large number of patients both near and afar.

In April 1559, a robber was to be tried: among other misdemeanors, he had broken into The White Dove, and taken away a wash tub. I begged my father-in-law, since he was member of the council, to have the cadaver placed at my disposal. Master Franz looked as if he thought my request would be rejected, because the University would claim the body; perhaps, also, he imagined that I would not know how to undertake a dissection. I was careful not to importune him further and I went to present my request to the burgomaster Franz Oberrieth. Although astonished in the first place that I should be desirous of undertaking such a labor alone, he evinced his good will toward me and promised to submit my request before the council the next day. On April 5, the criminal appeared before the court and was condemned to be decapitated. At the breaking up of the Council, my father-in-law came to tell me that the cadaver would be given over to me, which should be brought after the execution into the Church of St. Elizabeth, where I would have a permit to dissect it; only I was obliged to notify the doctors and barbers, so that they might witness the operation if they so desired.

Thus it was done. People of all conditions formed a numerous audience and I derived great honor from it because only a very long time before, not since Vesalius, had any public dissection taken place at Bâle. This work took me three days. I then boiled the limbs after they had been deprived of the flesh, I put them together, and had thus a skeleton that I still possess after fifty-three years. The mother of the robber was an over-seer of the women at the church of the hospital: many years had passed when one day she came to consult me. She had learned that the skeleton of her son was in my house; and in reality I had had a very nice show-case made for it in my room. This woman sat down on a bench quite near it, looked gravely at the skeleton without uttering a word; but when she went out she said to the people:

"Alas, will not one accord him a burying place?"

We now come to that portion of Platter's diary in which he describes the seven mortalities of Bâle, in other words, the

[112] seven visitations of the plague in this city. Although succinct, the description is most excellent and the statistics of deaths and recoveries are of very great importance, inasmuch as the figures demonstrate to what extent these ravages of former times went.

I remember that the first invasion of the plague occurred in 1539, 1540, and 1541, sometimes decreasing, at others redoubling its intensity. It lasted for three years, up to the end of 1541.

The second visitation of the plague took place during the years 1550, 1551, 1552, and 1553. It began towards the end of 1550, was extremely violent and killed many people. The following winter and even the spring time of 1552 were not so bad; nevertheless the scourge had not completely disappeared and in the autumn there was a very marked recrudescence in Great and in Little Bâle, which continued into April 1553.

The third plague, 1563 to 1564, was called The Great Mortality. It was extremely murderous although it did not last so long as the others. I had the opportunity of making myself useful to many people. The epidemic appeared in the winter of 1563; it extended up the Rhine and advanced to the Swiss countries; it disappeared towards the end of 1564, but it had time enough to carry away an extraordinary number of both young and old. Children were particularly afflicted, then the servants and workmen. Nearly all of those who, at the Saint-Jean, came back from foreign service, succumbed. The hospitals and the refuges were filled with the sick; among the middle class there were many victims, merchants and artisans, counsellors, savants, students, scholars and preachers. Pregnant women and those who had been delivered died for the most part. Likewise elderly people. At times, and I witnessed it, as many as twenty bodies were buried at once in the same ditch. The dead were transported without interruption from St. Elizabeth's hospital and were thrown into a large ditch; the latter remained open for several days until it had been well filled, and the bodies were only covered over by a very thin layer of earth. The streets were completely deserted; in the assemblies, at the churches and elsewhere, considerable emptiness prevailed and a number of widows and widowed were to be noticed. However, cases of cure after a long illness were far from being infrequent.

Although large, the number of victims is uncertain, because the deaths were not registered as was the case some years later. Thousands and thousands of deaths were commonly stated; this is an evident exaggeration. Dr. Sultzerus, at that time the first pastor, and myself who had to care for a large number of patients and who took notes of the deaths, we have, by calculating each on his own account, estimated the number of deaths at very nearly

four thousand; for Bâle this can hardly be counted as small. [112] At the hospital, according to the expenses of burial inscribed on the register from Februray 28, 1564 to March 24, 1565, I calculated that during this period the number of deaths must have been exactly two hundred.

As soon as the contagion was on its decline, and even while it was in its full blast, carrying away entire families, marriages continued to be contracted in full force. People remarried a few weeks after having been widowed; pregnant women, even nearly at their term, contracted second marriages, and the authorities were obliged to prevent them from taking a husband until a certain number of months had elapsed; widows and young girls were also ordered not to marry a stranger who was not a bourgeois, under the penalty of being expelled from the city.

The fourth mortality took place in 1576, 1577, and 1578. It broke out at Augst in the rue Blanche in 1576 at the house of a messenger who had brought it back with him from some unknown spot and who with his wife was the first victim, without counting that eight days later his brother-in-law and brother were in their turn seized upon. The plague spread from house to house and street to street, and soon it had invaded Augst and Bâle. It continued during the entire year of 1577, developing with more or less severity, sometimes here, sometimes there, up to the spring of 1578; then it ceased. During these two years the num- [113] ber of victims was quite large.

The fifth mortality occurred in 1582 to 1583. It commenced towards the month of July 1582 and lasted into March 1583. During this short lapse of time it carried away many people, about one thousand and ninety-five individuals. The records of the hospitals showed me that from July 1582 to March 1583 one hundred and three people died, the larger number from the plague; it also shows that the total number of recoveries was one hundred and fifteen. At St. Peter, eleven people were buried in July, twenty-five in August, twenty-eight in September, thirty-nine in October, thirty in November, thirty-one in December, and twenty-two in January and February, 1583.

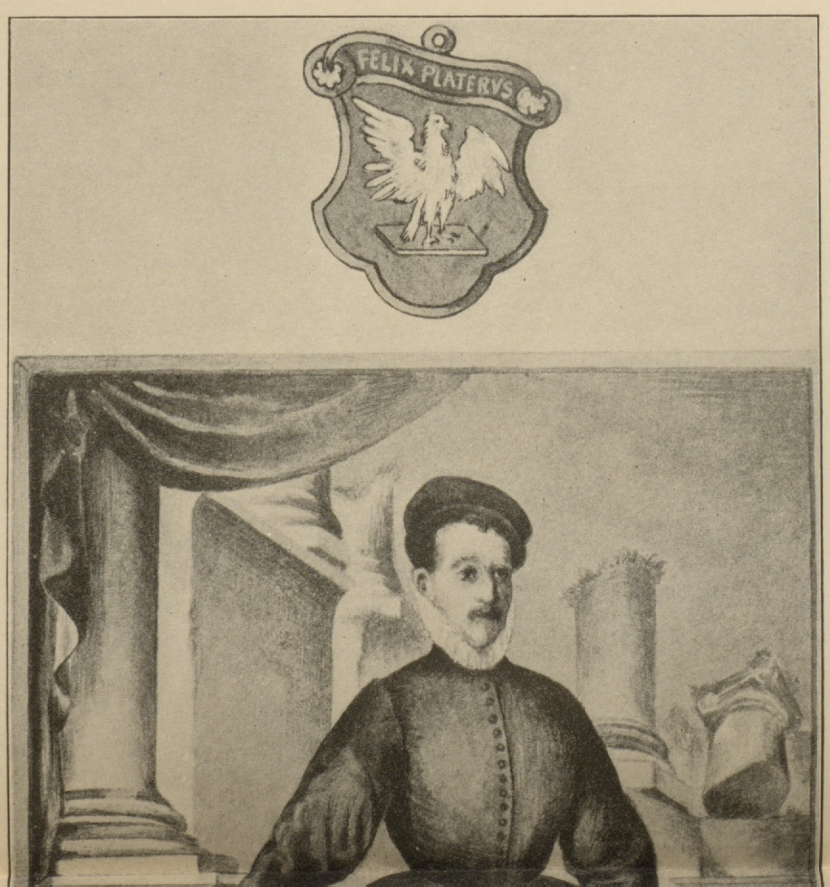
The sixth mortality appeared in 1593 and continued until the end of 1594. How many people were afflicted in this epidemic? This is a point upon which nothing absolute can be said, although it was in this very year that a record of births and deaths was commenced, these records being read on New Years' Day after the sermon of the evening. Five hundred and twenty-four people died in 1593 and nine hundred and two in 1594. If from these figures one deducts the average mortality in normal years, viz., two hundred and fifty, it may be supposed that in 1593 the epidemic carried away two hundred and seventy-four persons, and six hun-

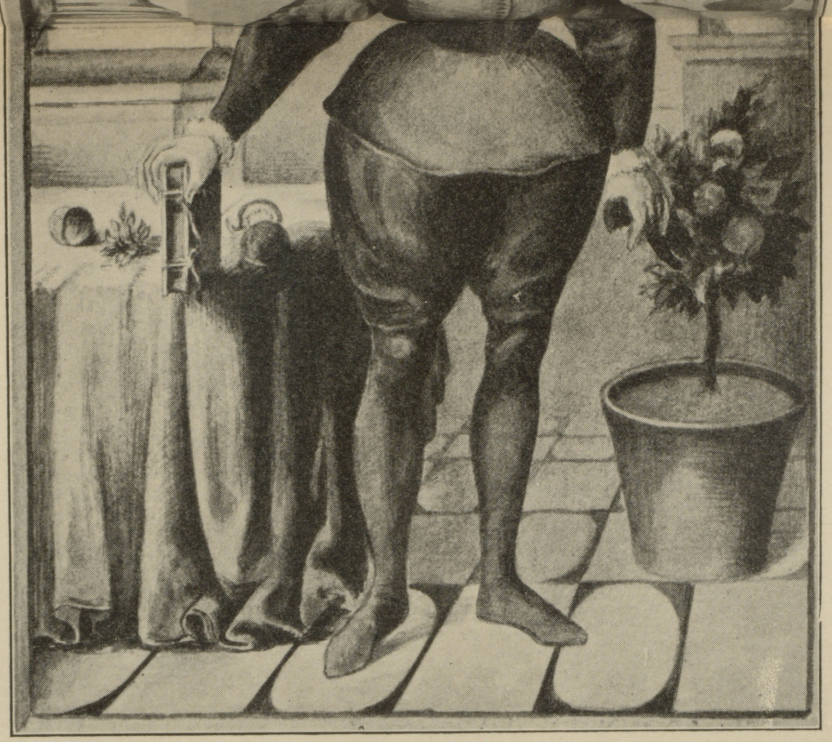
[113] dred and sixty in 1594; total: nine hundred and twenty-six persons, both young and old.

The seventh mortality (1609, 1610, 1611) commenced in October, 1609. The plague was already present in the country of the Margrave, particularly at Loerrach, likewise in several places in Alsace; It appears that the apprentice of the baker Algenburg contracted it at Schopfen, where everyone was dying, and brought it back to the house of his master who lived in Little Bâle. In the first place, neither the ordinary symptoms of the scourge nor the head-ache made themselves felt, so that little attention was paid to it, although in Great and Little Bâle the number of patients and deaths was from time to time greater than usual. There was even doubt that it was the plague, in spite of the characteristic symptoms which appeared here and there; but in July the epidemic declared itself frankly and with an increasing violence. From October 12, 1610, from two hundred and fifty to two hundred and eighty-eight people were buried each week; finally in December the scourge decreased to about one-half and even more.

| There were: | No. of cases | Deaths | Cures |
|---|---|---|---|
| In the five faubourgs .... | 1720 | 1146 | 574 |
| In the rest of the city.... | 2990 | 1913 | 1077 |
| In Little Bâle ..... | 1039 | 724 | 315 |
| At the hospital..... | 659 | 185 | 474 |
| Total ..... | 6408 | 3968 | 2440 |

In completing this recapitulation by means of the records of Saint Theodore and of the hospital, I find the total number of deaths comes to four thousand and forty-nine; there were one hundred and sixty-five families in which both the husband and the wife died.


FELIX PLATERVS



THE ARMS OF PLATTER.
After a painting on glass at the Bâle Museum.

FELIX PLATTER, ANNO ÆTATIS 48.
After a portrait painted in 1584 by Hans Bock of Bâle.